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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0001
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [KDEM](#) [TI](#)
SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN,S ISLAMIC REVIVAL PARTY: A FORMIDABLE
OPPONENT?

REF: DUSHANBE 1422

Classified By: DCM Tom Hushek for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Following his re-election in September 2007 as Islamic Revival Party Chairman, Muhuddin Kabiri promised to continue modernizing the party and increase party membership (reftel). Meetings throughout the country confirm that the Party has benefited from government policies that have alienated an increasingly religious population. The Party is a long way, however, from challenging the dominance of President Rahmon,s party. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) During the past month, PolOff met with Islamic Revival Party (also called the Islamic Renaissance Party) officials and supporters in Dushanbe, Isfara, and Kulob to discuss the party,s popularity, platforms, and leadership. PolOff also spoke to Harry Bader, Country Director of the National Democratic Institute in Dushanbe, whose local staff keep abreast of developments in the major political parties as part of their duties.

The Party Ranks Are Growing

¶3. (U) Among opposition parties, the Islamic Revival Party has been the single largest beneficiary of general dissatisfaction with the government. Statistics about party affiliation and support in Tajikistan are inherently unreliable, but our discussions corroborate claims that membership numbers are growing. Kabiri continues to claim that there are 25,000 members, and that the Party can count on the support of over 40,000. Party leaders in Isfara, one of the most religious parts of Tajikistan, have seen the party ranks grow by 70% in 8 years. Party leaders have also said that 70% of all Party members are under the age of 35.

¶4. (U) Disaffection with the government has spurred the Party,s growth. During our interviews, supporters and party leaders cited high unemployment, inflation, rampant corruption, and chronic shortages of fuel and energy as major reasons why the party has been able to gather more supporters. The Party has benefitted from the greater religiosity of younger generations, and because restrictions on religious practice have generated more interest in the Party, particularly in urban areas where the restrictions are focused. A Party leader in Kulob told us that &there is a vacuum in this country, and we occupy it,8 echoing Kabiri,s characterization of the government as being &secular extremists8 (reftel). Vohidkhoni Qosiddin, a high-ranking Party official in Dushanbe, informed us that Dovlatmo Ismailova, who sued the government after being expelled from

university for wearing a hijab, formally joined the party in late December 2007.

¶15. (U) The Party has a wide following among migrant workers in Russia. Harry Bader said his staff believe that remittances constitute a significant portion of Party funds, and remittances to the Party are significantly higher than those to the President's party. And our discussions with a group of migrants from Chorkuh, near Isfara, all Party sympathizers, showed how closely they follow internal party politics.

The Ranks Aren't Divided...Yet

¶16. (C) Party supporters include those who view politics as a means to infuse politics with more religion, and those who are religious yet understand the need to participate in secular society. Party leaders from Isfara fit into the former category. They are deeply religious and wear traditional garb, and some think Tajikistan should be a theocracy. Party leaders are not articulate about economic matters or party platforms, but they recognize that their religious appeal forms the foundation of the Party. When asked about Kabiri, the Isfara Party officials described him as being able to attract people who live modern lifestyles.⁸

¶17. (C) Kabiri heads the pragmatic side of the Party, and he has been able to maintain a high profile as the Party leader and Member of Parliament. Kabiri, however, has some potential conflicts of interest. His family runs a construction business, and he allegedly relies on relationships with government officials to procure contracts. There are rumors that Kabiri and other Party officials have misappropriated a large portion of the remittances the Party

has received. Finally, Harry Bader informed us that Kabiri has several girlfriends, and that he tried to take one with him on a National Democratic Institute-sponsored trip. If such behavior became common knowledge, it would significantly weaken Kabiri's position in the Party, particularly among more religious members.

The Party and the Government

¶18. (U) The Government views the Party as a threat to its hold on power, and has attempted to limit the Party's influence. Parts of the draft Law on Religion would allow the Government to severely limit the activities of the Party, or ban it outright. While those provisions of the draft law will likely be deleted, law enforcement agencies monitor activities of the Party and detain or question Party members under suspicion of extremist activity. According to Harry Bader, the Party does not do much fundraising in Tajikistan because of the threat of such harsh tactics.

¶19. (SBU) There are also questions about Kabiri's relationship with Government officials. Kabiri's willingness to accept compromises with the Government have led many to speculate that there is a growing rift in the Party, although none of our contacts mentioned this issue. Kabiri and Rahmatillo Zoirov, the Chairman of the opposition Social Democratic Party, were invited to Germany in 2007 to discuss the role of opposition parties with German parliamentarians. Zoirov told us that Kabiri made comments supporting the Government of Tajikistan, leading Zoirov to question whether Kabiri was actually an opposition politician.

¶10. (C) Comment: While the Party is far from challenging the existing power structure, the Party's swelling ranks indicate that this is an important constituency which we must engage. Party officials outside of Dushanbe are very curious about the United States. In Isfara and Kulob, they asked us why the United States supports the government despite the poor conditions in the country. After PolOff explained the types of activities we undertake to support democratic governance and religious freedom, they asked about the U.S.

stance on religious restrictions in Tajikistan, and they
wanted to find out more about political and religious life in
America. End Comment.
HUSHEK